

as which is further coupled to said front panel; a first rail which receives and which is linearly coextensive to said first side panel, said first rail coupling said first side panel to said front panel; and a second rail which is substantially identical to said first rail and which receives and which is linearly coextensive to said second side panel, said second rail coupling said second side panel to said front panel.

Ab Claim 3 (amended, "clean version")

The vehicle bed assembly of Claim 2 wherein each of said first and second rails respectively includes a generally flat top portion and two generally opposed side surfaces and wherein said end cap member is coupled to said generally flat top portion and to only one of said two generally opposed side surfaces of said first rail.

at Claim 14 (amended, "clean version")

A method for constructing a vehicle bed assembly, said method comprising the steps of:

- providing a floor pan;
- providing a front panel;
- providing a first side panel;
- providing a second side panel;
- providing a tail gate;
- coupling said front panel to said floor pan;
- coupling said first side panel to said floor pan;
- coupling said second side panel to said floor pan;

coupling said tail gate to said floor pan;

providing a direct load path from any location on said first side panel to a frame portion of a vehicle; and

providing a direct load path from any location on said second side panel to said frame portion of said vehicle, thereby forming said vehicle bed assembly;

wherein said step of providing a direct load path from any location on said first side panel to a frame portion of said vehicle comprises the steps of providing a first rail; coupling said first rail to said first side panel; providing a bracket; coupling said bracket to said front panel; coupling said first rail to said bracket; and coupling said bracket to said frame portion of said vehicle.

Claim 15 (amended, "clean version")

The method of Claim 14 wherein said step of providing a direct load path from any location on said second side panel to said frame portion of said vehicle comprises the steps of:

providing a second rail which is substantially identical to said first rail;

coupling said second rail to said second side panel; and

coupling said second rail to said bracket.

Claim 18 (amended, "clean version")

The method of Claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

providing a Z-shaped bracket;

coupling said Z-shaped bracket to said frame portion of said vehicle; and